



Briefing Paper
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To: Regional Transportation Commission

Subject: Request for Submission of Comments from the Regional Transportation Commission

This briefing paper is submitted to the Regional Transportation Commission in response to the invitation for comments from the Commission by letter dated August 2, 2006. Following are the City's comments responding to the questions asked by the Commission.

What regional transportation/transit governance structure would you recommend?

Response: The City of Auburn's response is based on the need to create an agency empowered to manage and govern a truly regional transportation system. The key word here is "System". The traveling public and business does not care about jurisdictional lines or the challenges our numerous agencies face to coordinate and provide services for each mode of travel. The majority of trips starts and ends on a local street and quite often cross several jurisdictions. The public's expectation for a regional system that is seamless and adequate to serve regional needs is one that the Commission needs to first consider in order to envision and create a regional governance. Otherwise, the public will continue to perceive a lack of accountability and will be reluctant to provide the financial resources to plan, build, and maintain a regional system sufficient to meet all needs.

Auburn favors a Four County Transportation District ("District") with a Board of Governors responsible to plan and manage the development and sustainability of the Regional System. The Regional System hereafter referred to as System should include **all municipal principle arterials** currently qualifying as a part of the Federal Highway System follows

- County and city arterials; and
- State highways and interstate freeways, to include bridges, and toll systems; and
- All transit services to include bus, commuter rail, and light rail; and,
- All ferry services within the Puget Sound Region.

The relationship between the District and the city, county, state and port transportation agencies would be defined by a division of responsibilities. The District would be responsible for planning and development of all capacity or capital improvements to maximize the capacity and efficiency of the system. Member agencies would continue to own, operate and maintain the portions of the highway and arterial system lying within each agencies jurisdiction, where the jurisdiction's land use and police powers would regulate use of the system by the public much as we do today.

In addition, the District would work directly with the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) to assure that all federal and state funds are programmed to fulfill the District's Long Range Capital Plan. Additionally, the District would coordinate with the member agencies to assure that sufficient annual operation and maintenance (O&M) funds are allocated to achieve and maintain a level of service and condition to support the land use plans of cities and counties. The System must be sustainable in order to secure and support the future opportunities for economic development. In Auburn, and other valley cities, unless we can find the means to generate additional new revenues in the future to reconstruct the majority of our designated freight routes, the City will be forced to close them to truck use in order to keep the condition of the pavement suitable and safe for the public.

The ports are key stakeholders to be included in determining the future needs of the System for freight. The governance structure needs to consider the impact of the ports on the System and appropriate means and fees to accommodate those needs in a manner that does not transfer the burden to jurisdictions that own and maintain the respective portions of the System. In addition, the ports' growth strategies may heavily influence traffic demand and congestion throughout the System. This information should be factored into decisions made by the regional governance structure. In turn, local government land use decisions may limit the ability of ports to implement their growth and development needs and strategies. The regional governance structure has the opportunity to provide some degree of needed coordination amongst the planning activities of all governing bodies within the district, including the ports and other special districts, to ensure that transportation demand and the region's land use system are in reasonable balance.

Organization

The Board should consist of nine members with two members elected by voters of each respective county and should serve on a rotational basis. The Chairman of the Board should be elected at large by voters of all four counties. Within each county, all city and county public works directors would continue to assure that the District Manager and staff and Board members are kept current on the conditions and needs of the Transportation System. The District under the guidance of the Board would manage the allocation of all federal and state transportation funds coming into the District with the mandate to provide the most efficient system for all modes of travel within the

district to include but not limited to Freight, SOV, HOV, Transit, Ferry, and Pedestrian. Cities and Counties and Ports would continue to plan, develop, and manage all local Streets & Roads which are not a part of the System.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of some of the more widely used governance structures?

Response: With the proposed structure the following advantages would accrue:

- The public would have a single accountable point of contact to address all public concerns with the Regional System. In light of the findings of the last Blue Ribbon report, restoring public confidence in our transportation agencies is probably the single most important goal of the new Governance entity.
- Comprehensive system planning for capacity expansion based on system modeling and based on the land use comprehensive plans for cities and counties would be feasible with a single entity.
- Comprehensive system response planning for emergencies resulting from natural disasters & terrorism with the goal of keeping the regional traffic flowing when any one portion of the System shuts down or becomes impassable.
- Feasible to provide a common fare for all transit modes (ferry, bus, & rail)
- Feasible to provide a coordinated schedule system for transfers between private and public transit modes (ferry, bus, & rail)
- Feasible to manage the regional system to a common level of infrastructure serviceability in a more equitable manner than can be achieved with our present governance structure. (Serviceability of all pavements, bridges, lighting and other features would be maintained to a minimal acceptable standard giving the public a sense of stability and confidence in the government's System management abilities. Currently there is a great discrepancy between jurisdictions for the serviceability of roadway conditions creating the impression that government either does not care or does not know how to keep the system in acceptable condition. With a common system manager the limited preservation funds would be applied where most needed to serve the land use demands of the system. This would resolve equity issues among the jurisdictions where the local jurisdictions by virtue of location must share an unusually high share of the region's burden with absolutely no consideration for regional financial assistance. For example, the cities of Algona, Pacific and Auburn are obligated to maintain Ellingson Road as a truck route that actually benefits the region far more than it benefits the cities because this route is a primary haul route for ICON, a contractor who bids on asphalt projects for the region. Another example is presented by West Valley Highway which parallels SR 167 from Sumner to Tukwila. This is a key freight route for the Valley Cities Distribution Center. Yet there is currently no mechanism for funding either of these burdens with regional resources. Considering the benefit of these two key arterials to the region and the impacts to the region if they have to be closed to freight traffic for the lack of funding, the Commission should derive a method of assuring that our key freight routes that serve the second largest distribution center on the west coast can be adequately funded. A common System manager would have the

opportunity to equitably evaluate and distribute the benefits and burdens of paying tolls if the tolls collected are in turn expended for the benefit of the system. (Tolling Equity)

- A common System manager would have the opportunity to streamline the biennial federal process for allocation of federal transportation funding. This would greatly reduce the burden on all local agencies currently involved to allocate funds. Agency resources could provide meaningful input to the District to assist in funding allocations in a much more efficient process than we are currently required to follow. This would free up agency staff to accomplish more important work.
- A common System manager would create the opportunity to develop a Small Cities program to offer meaningful transportation management services to small cities that own a part of the System but have insufficient full time transportation staff to manage and maintain it.

What criteria and impacts should the RTC consider when evaluating different governance structures, particularly as it pertains to your city?

Response: For this response please refer to the Final Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission for Transportation prepared under the Locke administration (http://wstc.wa.gov/TPAB/Benchmark_FINAL_Report.pdf).

The concerns you will hear from citizens of the region are likely to reaffirm the findings of the report on the State System. The following criteria should be considered in planning a future governance structure:

1. Regaining public trust and confidence in transportation governance is a primary and is possibly the most important criteria or goal we should pursue.
2. Establish a governance structure that the citizen can understand and can look to for accountability when issues arise. Citizens want a “Go to” entity that is willing to be accountable for transportation. Currently citizens cannot readily tell when they cross the boundaries between city/county/and state systems or any one of the transit agencies. So it is confusing to determine who or what agency to contact when the service of the system is substandard or does not meet the public’s expectations.
3. We need to get beyond the current inequities and dislocations that do nothing but create friction among the agencies and private industry that depend upon the Arterial System that spans various cities, counties, and the state.

The best local example that illustrates this point is the Valley Cities Industrial Center located along SR 167 between the cities of Fife and Renton. This industrial center supports over 250,000 jobs, spans nine cities, and creates an annual state tax revenue of over \$200M. It is the second largest Industrial Center on the West Coast. Its viability is key to the health of the Ports of Tacoma and Seattle and the four county region. Yet to serve this Center the counties and cities have freight routes which cannot be maintained to a serviceability condition to continue to support the current land use with the revenues cities and counties currently receive. Clearly, if the land use is to

remain in support of the freight and shipping industry something will have to change to finance the infrastructure needed for the future.

While GMA requires cities and counties to manage to concurrency in transportation and land use, it excuses the State or the region from such obligations. As a region, we need to address this key issue if our regional transportation System is to be adequate to meet future economic development goals of the region. Local government transportation systems (i.e. local arterials) are heavily impacted by the failure of the state transportation system.

The ability of the governance structure to understand the relationships between transportation and land use planning within the context of the GMA. This includes developing a transportation system supportive of regional plans (i.e. urban centers) through improvements and service programs.

The governance structure must also consider and allow for the relationships between transportation and the need for long term economic development planning of local governments. Transportation improvements and services should be viewed as a catalyst for local economic development efforts and the relationship between the two (transportation and economic development) needs to be strongly wedded.

What impacts do you predict for your city if the local transit and transportation authorities were consolidated under a new umbrella governance structure?

Response: The City of Auburn has already been severely impacted during the last ten years of declining transportation revenues to the point that our current deficit for preserving the Arterial System consisting of some 65 miles of arterial streets amounts to some \$25M to \$32M. This deficit continues to grow annually. (This estimated deficit is based upon a system rating performed in 2004 which is currently being updated at the time this paper is being drafted.) Since 2004 we have experienced significant increases in the cost of performing street preservation due to worldwide increases in oil prices. The City's annual revenues amount to only \$790,000. The 2005 Nickel gas tax did little to resolve this dilemma. The cost increase the City has realized from a preservation project bid in 2005 versus those bid in 2006 reflect an annual increase in the cost of preservation work by approximately 36%. The city would expect more benefits than impacts from a new umbrella governance structure providing the new structure provides the financial security for a common and adequate system wide level of infrastructure condition that is designed and constructed to a standard to meet current land use needs. This means that existing Freight and Bus routes which are necessary for supporting economic development and existing heavy industry would receive priority of regional funding to assure that the safety features and conditions of roadway surfaces are maintained in a manner that can continue to sustain the needs of the freight industry and our Transit services while assuring that the motoring public's safety is also secured.

What is your city's current finance structure for transportation and transit? Please use visual representations to show how much of your revenue comes from state, federal, and local sources, and how that money is spent and on what program areas or major projects. How would your finance structure change if governance of local transportation was consolidated? How would that impact your service delivery?

Response: The City of Auburn does not have a dedicated fund or revenues received for Transit needs. The City has partnered with King County Metro and Sound Transit for specific projects that promote Transit Oriented Development.

The City's Street Maintenance and Operations Division operates and maintains the public street system consisting of 165 centerline miles of local streets and arterials. The labor, supplies and equipment necessary to run the 10 man Street Division is financed from the City's General Fund with annual revenues generated from the City's portion of Motor Vehicle Gas Tax.

Local Street Fund: On the November 2004 ballot Voters approved Proposition No. 1, which allows the City's property tax levy to generate money for a Dedicated Local Street Fund used solely for the repair and preservation of Local Streets. The program is called Save our Streets (SOS).

Currently the levy generates about \$500,000 annually which, when combined with other funding sources, funds the SOS Program with \$1.2 million annually. When the fund was initially established oil prices were in the \$32 to \$45 per barrel price range. As oil prices escalate, the City has had to increase the annual subsidy from other revenue resources to assure the annual work effort remains constant to keep faith with the citizens who approved this revenue source.

Arterial Street Fund: Every year the City updates its Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) with a projection of all capital improvements and known revenue sources for the arterial street system and for the non-motorized sidewalk and trail improvements. At the time of drafting this paper the City is updating its 2007-2012 TIP. Once adopted by the City Council a copy can be transmitted to the Commission.

The TIP lists some 45 projects and all known or possible financial resources (State & Federal loans & Grants) for each project. It also lists the current steady revenue sources that the City relies upon to financially constrain the initial three years of the TIP. These current annual recurring revenues are:

1. Motor Vehicle fuel Tax: \$290,000 plus \$83,300 from the 2005 Nickel Tax.
2. Real Estate Excise Tax: \$500,000.
3. Traffic Impact Fees: Estimated at \$250,000.

The City's most significant challenge is the underfinanced Arterial Street System for preservation of existing infrastructure to support existing land use & zoning. The City is centered on SR 167 and SR 18 freeways which during AM and PM peaks are inadequate to handle a significant portion

of the regional traffic. Congestion on the two state facilities forces considerable traffic including much of the Industrial Center's Freight traffic to detour and use the City's Arterials to get through the city avoiding the congested freeways. Due to the City's geographical location a good portion of the average daily traffic is considered Pass - Thru Traffic. This regional burden on a local arterial system that was never designed nor constructed to handle the heavy loads of industrial center traffic has taken a toll on the city's arterial system creating a significant backlog of deferred preservation work, particularly on designated Truck and Bus Routes. Yet we are consistently told by King County that preserving bus routes is the City's mandate and is not a legitimate use of transit funds. Since the large metro buses have the highest axle loading of all heavy vehicles that use the system, the City feels that this policy should be reevaluated. If growth should pay for growth, then why should we not expect Transit to help pay for impacts roads of the jurisdictions that they use? The Commission should be looking at such inequities in the interest of promoting economic development by providing the additional financial assistance that local cities and counties need to maintain the parts of the "System" that must function when state routes are insufficient to serve such needs.

These regional burdens upon the local system are placing increasingly greater constraints on the city's ability to accommodate growth and development and/or to preserve the quality of life our residents desire and deserve. With the GMA's concurrency requirements, we have been faced with lowering levels of service on our street system in order to accept growth and development. But in doing so, we are lowering the level of service and to some extent the quality of life for our local residents. This is becoming an increasingly unacceptable choice and, unless rectified, may require that the city re-evaluate its ability to accept growth at the levels preciously anticipated. Over the past 10 years while transportation revenues were shrinking, the City has financially participated in a number of major arterials that benefited the flow of regional traffic while sacrificing our ability to perform the needed preservation of much of the arterial system. We now need the region to step up to the plate and assist us with rebuilding a good portion of the arterials that will be needed to serve regional needs, if the region expects to continue to take benefit of these key facilities.